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Recreational Activities and the Risk of Diseases Spread by Mosquitoes and Ticks

Summer is coming to a close, but that does not lessen the risk of tick-borne diseases such as Lyme disease or mosquito-borne diseases such as West Nile virus (WNV) and eastern equine encephalitis (EEE). Ticks that spread Lyme disease are found throughout Massachusetts, and are active almost year round. This year, some areas of Massachusetts are experiencing high levels of mosquito-borne virus activity. The peak time that mosquitoes spread these viruses to humans is generally in late summer and early fall. This is also the time of year that school sports and fall leagues begin their outdoor practices.

Participation in outdoor activities at any time of day increases exposure to ticks and mosquitoes. Children and adults participate in many sports and recreational activities during the evening when many kinds of mosquitoes are most actively biting. In addition, physical exertion and sweating can attract mosquitoes and may decrease the time that repellents are effective.

By taking a few commonsense precautions, people can protect themselves against ticks and mosquitoes while still enjoying outdoor activities.

Schedule Outdoor Activity to Avoid Peak Mosquito Hours. The hours from dusk to dawn are peak mosquito biting times for many mosquitoes. Consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times.

Clothing Can Help Reduce Tick and Mosquito Bites. When you are outdoors, wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and socks. This may be difficult to do when the weather is hot, but it will help to keep ticks and mosquitoes away from your skin.

Apply Insect Repellent When You Go Outdoors. A wide variety of insect repellent products are available. The repellents that are most effective against **both** mosquitoes and ticks contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) or permethrin. Always follow the instructions on the product label. DEET products can be used directly on skin and on clothing. Products containing DEET should not be used on children less than 2 months of age. Permethrin products are designed to be used on clothing and should not be used directly on skin. Products containing Picaridin (KBR 3023) are only effective against mosquitoes. Products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus [p-methane 3, 8-diol (PMD)] have also been found to provide as much protection

against mosquitoes as low concentrations of DEET. Products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children less than 3 years of age.

Check for Ticks after Spending Time Outdoors. Thoroughly check your skin for ticks that may have attached themselves while you were outdoors. Young ticks, called nymphs, are the size of a poppy seed. Adult deer ticks are the size of a sesame seed. When doing a tick check, remember that ticks like places that are warm and moist. Always check the back of the knees, armpits, groin, scalp, back of the neck and behind the ears. If you find a tick attached to your body, remove it as soon as possible using a fine-point tweezers. Do not squeeze or twist the tick's body, but grasp it close to your skin and pull straight out with steady pressure.

For more information about insect repellents and safe use of repellents, please see the Mosquito Repellents Fact Sheet and the Tick Repellents Fact Sheet on the MDPH website at: <http://mass.gov/dph/cdc/factsheets/factsheets.htm>.

Contact your local board of health for the latest information about WNV and EEE virus, the level of virus activity in your specific area, and additional steps you may take to reduce your risk of infection.

General information on mosquito-borne diseases can be obtained by visiting the MDPH web site on arboviral (mosquito-transmitted) diseases at: <http://www.mass.gov/dph/wnv/wnv1.htm>.

General information on Lyme disease and other tickborne diseases can be found on the MDPH website at: <http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/lyme/lymehp.htm>.

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